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NEA

July 18, 1986

Hon. George Shultz
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

With Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo of Pakistan in town this week for discussions with the Administration and Congress, I thought you might like to see a copy of the enclosed essay I recently wrote for The New York Times, on the need for a more active American effort on behalf of democracy in that country.

I would, of course, be most interested in your reaction to it.

Cordially,

STEPHEN J. SOLARZ
Member of Congress

SJS:cda
Enclosure

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The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JULY 13, 1986

Toward Pakistani Democracy

By Stephen J. Solarz

WASHINGTON — Now that democracy has been restored in the Philippines, the United States needs to consider how best to promote political pluralism in Pakistan if we are going to protect our strategic interests on the subcontinent as effectively as we protected them in southeast Asia.

Energized by the return of Benazir Bhutto, the democratic opposition in Pakistan is mounting a fundamental challenge to the military-backed Government of President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq. The Pakistani Government must seriously consider whether political stability can be maintained without some concessions to the opposition. The Reagan Administration must weigh whether it is possible to secure our substantial strategic interests in southwest Asia without more active advocacy of democracy.

The latest flurry of opposition activity began in April when Miss Bhutto, daughter of the former Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, returned to her country from Europe. Millions of Pakistanis attended her rallies, with hundreds of thousands sometimes waiting through the night to hear her speak. Fortified in her conviction that the great majority of her countrymen desire more rapid [illegible] toward full democracy, she has called for new parliamentary elections this year.

The Government cavalierly dismisses these mammoth turnouts as congregations of curiosity seekers otherwise deprived of public entertainment, and it refuses to hold elections before the constitutionally mandated date of 1990. How the conflict between the Government and the opposition will resolve itself is impossible to predict. It is possible that the looming confrontation can be resolved in a way that lays a firm foundation for a pluralistic political system. But the potential for widespread instability leading to a reimposition of martial law cannot be ruled out.

To be sure, General Zia has taken some significant steps toward democracy. Martial law was lifted last December. The military has returned to the barracks, and a civilian Government, based in the National Assembly elected by a majority of Pakistanis, has been established. Freedom of association has clearly been restored, and political parties have been made legal again.

Whether these measures are sufficient to satisfy the people in Pakistan is another question. Miss Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party holds that the civilian Government is merely a facade for continued military control, and she refuses to acknowledge its legitimacy. She also denies that the legislative elections in 1985 were an exercise of popular will because no parties were allowed to participate. And she is unwilling to wait until 1990 for new elections.

A U.S. nudge for early elections would serve our strategic interests

The situation is so delicate that political stability could be shattered at any time. Demonstrations, thus far peaceful, could turn violent. If things get out of hand, the army would be strongly tempted to step in and reimpose martial law. Its inclination to do so would be enhanced by its fears of vengeance by the opposition — despite Miss Bhutto's pledge not to seek retribution for the overthrow and execution of her father.

The critical, and as yet indeterminate, element in the political equation is whether Miss Bhutto's party, so far composed largely of the disaffected poor and middle classes, will get the support of the establishment — the industrialists, professional groups, bazaar merchants and large landowners, who have not forgotten how they suffered from her father's abuse of power. If these groups decide to support the Government, Miss Bhutto's party will surely lose momentum and will find it much more difficult to induce the Government to agree to new elections, [illegible]

If Miss Bhutto's opposition campaign does not lose steam, the best — and perhaps only — way of avoiding a crisis and preserving national unity would be to consolidate the democratic process through new elections in which political parties are allowed to participate. An election within the next two years would mean going to the people sooner than the Government intends but later than Miss Bhutto hopes. Such an electoral schedule might not satisfy all the contestants for political power, but it would serve the interests of democracy, reconciliation and peace.

Strategically, the United States has much to lose from the disorder and dictatorship that could easily result from a failure to call new elections. Pakistan plays a critical role in the effort to end the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and that contribution could easily be jeopardized if it becomes a major political issue in Pakistan. Some Pakistanis already believe that the aid we provide the Zia Government because of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan effectively keeps the regime in power, and that General Zia and company serve American rather than Pakistani interests. In the absence of real progress toward genuine democracy, Pakistan's policy toward Afghanistan could be a major source of domestic contention.

A period of extended political conflict in Pakistan could seriously jeopardize the prospects for regional peace and stability. It would increase Moscow's temptations to meddle in Pakistan and diminish what incentives the Russians have to reach a just settlement of the Afghan conflict. And if there is a reimposition of martial law, the United States Congress would be less likely to continue high levels of economic and security assistance, thus jeopardizing the Afghan resistance.

How Pakistan resolves its problems is up to the Pakistani people themselves. Yet given the magnitude of our assistance program — the Administration has proposed $4 billion for 1988 to 1993 — we clearly have leverage to influence the course of events in Pakistan. In order to defuse political tensions and to create the basis for a more stable political order, we should encourage an agreement between the Government and the opposition on midterm elections in 1987 or 1988. With Prime Minister Mohammed Khan Junejo in Washington this week, the Administration has a good opportunity to do just that. Pakistan is one more country where we can advance our security interests by promoting our political ideals. □

Stephen J. Solarz, Democrat of New York and a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, visited Pakistan in May.